



# Brickies in demand as builders face delays

DANIEL EMERSON The West Australian  
October 4, 2014, 2:40 am

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Good times: Brickies Marty Kelly, Thomas Christy and Damien Kelly.  
Picture: Steve Ferrier/The West Australian

Perth is in the grips of a bricklayer shortage that is delaying the construction of residential homes by up to 10 weeks and prompting builders to "poach" workers from each other.

The tactics were revealed by Australia's biggest homebuilder, WA's BGC, which claimed the shortage was fuelling unprecedented interest in

alternative building techniques, including modular homes.

After slumping to 17,790 in 2011-12, new home building projects peaked at a record 28,650 last financial year and demand is only strengthening, with 30,000 approvals in the pipeline.

The surge is being driven by low interest rates, first-home- owners cashing in on stamp duty concessions and the \$10,000 First Home Owner Grant to build new homes, boosted by \$3000 in the 2013-14 State Budget.

Tradespeople such as roof carpenters, plasterers, and wall and floor tilers are in demand, but none more than bricklayers, with some earning up to \$2 a brick compared with \$1.40 last October and \$1 the year before that.

BGC Residential chief executive Kelvin Ryan said a good indicator of the severity of a bricklayer shortage was the number of newspaper job advertisements, usually three or four under normal conditions.

Wednesday's \_The West Australian\_ had 31 advertisements for bricklayers. "There's no denying it's an issue, it's biting and no builder is immune from it," Mr Ryan said. "We have had some bricklayers say, 'Yes, we will come to a job' and then not show up and when you ring them it's because somebody else has poached them with more money."

Master Builders Association executive director Michael McLean said delays inevitably increased

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building costs but fixed-price contracts meant it was builders rather than customers who paid for them.

Housing Industry Association WA executive director John Gelavis said delays in securing bricklayers, "anywhere from six to 10 weeks", were made worse by recent wet weather.

Bricklayer Marty Kelly, working for homebuilder 101 Residential in South Guildford, described himself as "flat out". "It's a good time to be a bricklayer," he said.

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